

## ANNAMITE CIVILIZATION

out the villages so as to suppress the numerous local variations. A hierarchy of genii was also created, in imitation of the Chinese, whose brevets were renewed annually, with promotion or demotion by the Emperor on the basis of merit acquired during the past year.

Confucianist doctrine is set forth in the four classical books, composed by the master's disciples, and in the five canonical books written by Confucius himself. There is no first cause: force and matter have existed throughout all eternity, with the former steadily gaining ground at the expense of the latter. This action of force upon matter, akin to the active or masculine element upon the feminine or passive element, has produced heaven and earth, and from their union came mankind. This celestial origin has endowed man with an essentially good nature. But to preserve it intact he must sharpen his reason so that its clarity may not be obscured by his emotions. Heaven has endowed each person with a conscience that permits him to distinguish good from evil. Virtue, through the tranquillity it assures to the soul, is—familiarily enough—its own reward. For some scholars virtue has also meant more material advantages, like the trio of happinesses—fortune, longevity, and male progeny. Confucianism would have remained a purely ethical system in Annam, had it not been for its union with the old Annamite spirit world whose constant intervention has made life so complicated and uneasy. Confucianism did successfully regulate the relations between people,<sup>1</sup> and gave harmonious unity to the body politic and social. But it also grafted on to an exaggerated respect for tradition innumerable superstitions which have become hopelessly enmeshed with the original doctrine. Confucius himself has become a deity.

The cult of the dead had long existed in Annam before Confucianism adapted and laicized it. A rigid and immutable character was infused into this cult by placing it among the sacrificial rites. In trying to cleanse it of superstition and magic, so as to make of it a suitable instrument for good government and social order, filial piety was made the central pivot of this heavy pseudo-religious mechanism. The ancestral cult became the regulator of family unity and morality. The finer points of Confucianism, as shown in its innumerable commentaries, were appreciated exclusively by the scholar class who scorned the popular forms of Buddhism and Taoism.

Confucianism, as it filtered through to the masses in the form of rites, has a social value. The cult of the dead aims to affirm the immortality

<sup>1</sup> The relation of subject to sovereign, son to father, wife to husband, younger to older brother, and friend for friend.